A New Vision of Education

Education is the foundation of a quality life and a globally competitive workforce. As such, education must encompass the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences to equip each and every student for lifelong learning, successful careers, and long-term economic self-sufficiency as responsible, fully contributing adults. These educational goals can be accomplished if all teachers are supported in effectively integrating and delivering quality standards-based instruction that addresses the relationship between education and work.

To support these instructional efforts, local partnerships must be established and maintained among educational institutions, communities, families, and business and industry that add context and relevance to education. These partnerships must ensure that each individual learning experience becomes part of a larger standards-based system. This system must seamlessly connect the various educational levels and lead to rewarding and high-wage, high-demand careers for every student.

Moving to this vision of education will require shared accountability between the educational system and students, both collectively and individually. The following guiding principles can lay a foundation for improved educational outcomes for every student in Illinois.

Guiding Principles

♦ Every student should have access to rigorous, relevant courses and varied teaching and learning strategies.
♦ Every student should achieve rigorous learning standards.
♦ Every student should obtain the skills necessary to seek and keep employment.
♦ Every student should learn the skills necessary to access, analyze, evaluate, organize and present information in a technologically advanced society.
♦ Every student should be provided with the skills and knowledge to make a lifetime of informed career decisions.
♦ Every student should prepare for education/training beyond high school, and understand the need for lifelong learning.
♦ Every student must have access to a full spectrum of quality career awareness, exploration, planning, and preparation opportunities that enables them to acquire the level of career-specific skills they desire.
♦ Every student should have the opportunity to benefit from an education system that is able to respond to the rapidly changing needs of employers and society.
To this end, every student must be equipped with the competencies he or she will need to participate fully in society and the economy. Students should have instruction in core academics coupled with career exploration at all levels, a practical knowledge of current technology, and opportunities for work-based learning experiences and career-specific training in their area of interest. Instruction must be both cost-effective as well as appropriate to the learning needs and learning styles of all students.

Illinois’ educational system must demonstrate accountability and be flexible enough to respond to the current and emerging needs of the state’s economy by offering students the widest possible array of quality career options.

**Components of a New Vision of Education**

To achieve this vision of education, three educational components must be made available to every student in Illinois.

**Rigorous and Relevant Learning**

Every student must be equipped with the competencies he or she will need to participate fully in society and the economy. There must be renewed emphasis on problem solving, teamwork, communication skills, and using businesses and communities as resources for education. The following components should be imbedded into all instruction and taught in ways that address different learning styles:

- Rigorous academic instruction applied to real-world problems and examples that draw from the community and the workplace.
- Basic workplace readiness skills instruction with appropriate assessment.
- Community and work-based learning experiences tied to students’ interests.
- Technological literacy that addresses how technology impacts daily life and the workplace.

**Career Awareness, Exploration and Planning**

Career education must be a responsibility of each student, parent, community member and educator at every grade level, in every discipline and in every class. The career development process must begin in early elementary school and be coordinated, supported and linked to classroom learning throughout every student’s educational experience. There are three elements of career education that lay the groundwork for career-specific preparation.

- **Career Awareness.** Helps students understand the nature of work and acquire basic knowledge about broad career areas.
- **Career Exploration.** Helps students discover their individual interests and abilities by exploring career areas and learning how education relates to work. Students test their preliminary career interests through such activities as career orientation courses, field trips, and job shadowing.
- **Career Planning.** Students develop a career plan that addresses both their
educational and career goals. This plan is continually updated and revised as student interests, aspirations and accomplishments change.

**Career-Specific Preparation**

This new vision of education calls for an education that weaves together rigorous and relevant academics, a career focus, critical thinking, ethics, interpersonal skills, and opportunities to acquire career-specific knowledge and skills. It is built around broad career clusters or groupings of related career areas that enable a student to pursue a wide array of occupations. The academic core for every cluster will include the same high-level rigorous courses in math, science, English, and social studies but is infused with applications related to the chosen career cluster. Students progress along a continuum of career-specific preparation that encompasses three broad components.

♦ Students experience and understand the nature of work in their chosen career cluster. Based on what the student learns, he or she may choose to change clusters. The curriculum must allow this flexibility.

♦ Students may take courses that are a part of the technical core of the career cluster. These courses are not “skills-only job training” but incorporate high levels of academics that students learn within the discipline. Students participate in career-related internships.

♦ Students may enter occupations within their chosen career cluster through specialized skill training at the secondary and postsecondary levels that leads to employment, certification and professional recognition.

**Conclusion**

To achieve and maintain successful economic development and global competitiveness in Illinois, we must seize this opportunity to re-engineer traditional education. Strong partnerships within education and among educational institutions, communities, families, and business and industry are the foundation to building one integrated educational system that improves the quality and relevance of public education and prepares every student for a personally and professionally rewarding life in the 21st Century.